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	ISN-00	NSCE-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	PM-00	GIWI-00
	PRS-00	P-00	ISNE-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00
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SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF PROVINCIAL PARTY CONGRESSES IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN VIETNAM

REF: HCMC 29

1. (SBU) Summary: In late 2005, provincial Communist Party Committees in southern and central Vietnam conducted their Party Congresses to select the new crop of provincial leaders for the 2006-2010 term. The results may offer some indication of the thinking and direction of the Party as it prepares for the national 10th Party Congress this April. Stability, local roots and longevity were watchwords of the congresses, with only 23 of 96 leadership posts changing. (There may be additional changes in the offing, particularly in HCMC, as key provincial leaders get tapped for central-level Party and government posts during the 10th Party Congress.) Functionaries linked to security, ideology and organizational affairs appeared to gain, especially in provinces hit by corruption scandals. Notable personnel changes in the Central Highlands include the removal of the ultra-hardline Party Secretary of Dak Lak Province and the promotion to a key central-level Party slot of the Party Secretary of Gia Lai Province. The current cohort is the last

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generation of provincial Party leaders with common formative roots in the "American War." End Summary.

Stability, Parochialism and Longevity

2. (SBU) In November and December 2005, 33 provinces in southern and central Vietnam held Party Congresses to select leaders for the 2006-2010 term, review and set local policy and development goals, and provide input to the Party in preparation for the national 10th Party Congress, slated for the second quarter of 2006. Excluding HCMC, only eight of 32 provincial Party Secretary positions and 15 of 64 provincial Deputy Secretary

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positions changed. (The eight are: Can Tho, Long An, Tien Giang, An Giang, Vinh Long, Binh Thuan, Dak Lak, and Gia Lai.) The Party Secretaries are required to be members of the Central Committee. Those newly elected Secretaries, if not presently members of the Party's Central Committee, must be selected at the 10th National Party Congress or face replacement.

3. (SBU) Our contacts tell us that the proposal to merge of the positions of Party General Secretary and State President was not discussed at the provincial Party Congresses. This, they explain, likely would preclude the Party from taking such a step at the 10th Party Congress as the Party normally would vet a major policy change at lower levels before taking it up at the national level. In contrast, the proposal to allow Party members to participate in private business -- another possible reform -- apparently was debated at the provincial Party Congresses.

4. (SBU) The provinces largely appear to be ignoring the January 2002 Politburo decree encouraging the transfer of party cadre between provinces and the Central Government and Party. With two exceptions, all the Party Secretaries and the Deputies rose through their local party apparatuses to take the top slots in their provinces. Nguyen Tuan Khanh, former Secretary of the Gia Lai Province Party Committee, was appointed Deputy Chief of the Central Commission on Home Security, replacing Nguyen Tan Quyen. Quyen, in turn, was appointed Secretary of the Can Tho Party Committee. Quyen's appointment to Can Tho is a homeward

journey. He was elected Can Tho Party Secretary after three years as Deputy Chief of the Central Commission on Home Security (the Commission oversees internal security and law enforcement organizations including the police and prosecutor's office). Prior to that, Quyen was Party Secretary of Soc Trang Province in the Mekong Delta.

Education and Career

15. (SBU) University-level education is not a prerequisite for provincial leadership, but ideological grounding is. Of the 33 provincial Party Secretaries, less than a third have higher-level education. (Five -- in An Giang, Tay Ninh, Binh Thuan, Khanh Hoa, and Ba Ria-Vung Tau -- have BAs; two -- in Lam Dong and Dong Nai -- have MAs; and three -- in Danang, Quang Nam and Ninh Thuan -- have PhDs.) However, all Party Secretaries and their deputies must have an "advanced degree" in

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politics. The majority of the current Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries obtained this certificate by taking courses offered

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at the provincial political schools where visiting professors from the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy are sent to teach. As a rule, the Deputy Director of a provincial government department or the Vice-Chairman of a District People's Committee must have an advanced degree in politics to be appointed to their post.

16. (SBU) The job histories of the current cohort of Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries shows that the Party prefers to promote those involved in organization, security and ideology over those focusing on economics and development. The vast majority once headed provincial Departments of Public Security or Military Commands, or served as heads of the provincial Committees for

Party Control, Organizational Affairs, Home Security, ore Culture and Ideology. For example, the Party Secretaries of Ca Mau and Dong Thap provinces previously headed their provincial Military Commands. The two current Deputy Secretaries of Lam Dong headed the provincial Public Security Department and Military Command, respectively. Kien Giang's new Standing Deputy Secretary, Bui Quang Ben, was the Director of the province's Public Security Department. Dak Lak's new Deputy Secretary, Lu Ngoc Cu, was Director of the province's Public

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Security Department, as was Gia Lai's new Deputy Party Secretary, Ksor Nham.

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The Southern School Club

17. (SBU) Although obtaining biographic material on Party leaders is difficult, a significant number of current provincial leaders appear to belong to the "Southern School" cohort. These are students identified by the Party as future leaders and sent during the "American War" to a special school in the North. Members of this group include An Giang Secretary Nguyen Hoang Viet, former Gia Lai Party Secretary Nguyen Tuan Khanh (who was recently promoted to a central-level Party job in Hanoi -- see paragraph 8), Ba Ria Vung Tau Secretary Nguyen Tuan Minh, Danang Secretary Nguyen Ba Thanh, Danang Deputy Secretary Hoang Tuan

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Anh, Quang Nam Secretary Va Ngoc Hoang, and Quang Nam Deputy Secretary Nguyen Xuan Phuc. Prime Minister Phan Van Khai

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reportedly also is a graduate of the "Southern School."

Seniority matters; Women and Minorities Underrepresented

18. (SBU) The Party does not appear to have a mechanism to allow talented young officials to advance quickly to leadership positions. All but three deputy secretaries of the 2006-2010 cohort are in their mid-fifties or older. Of the roughly 100 possible senior Party leadership positions, women and ethnic minorities hold only six. Tra Vinh Province appointed an ethnic Khmer Deputy Secretary, Dak Lak an ethnic Ede Secretary, Gia Lai an ethnic Jarai Deputy Secretary, and Kontum an ethnic Sedang woman Party Secretary. Tien Giang and Tay Ninh provinces also have female Party Secretaries.

Persons to Watch

19. (SBU) Nguyen Tuan Khanh has emerged as a rising political star. He was Deputy Party Secretary of An Giang Province before his promotion to Secretary of Gia Lai in 2002. Khanh, who is reportedly linked to Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, is

credited for overcoming the opposition of hardliners in Gia Lai, facilitating greater socio-economic development for ethnic minorities and easing restrictions on Protestant groups. A contact from An Giang told us that Khanh will be promoted to Chief of the Central Commission on Home Security after the National Party Congress. Quang Nam Deputy Party Secretary and Chairman of the People's Committee Nguyen Xuan Phuc is rumored to be a contender for an economic-sector Ministerial position in the GVN; Phuc, a graduate of the Fulbright Economic Teaching Program, is widely credited for being one of the prime movers behind the emergence of Quang Nam's tourism sector.

Mostly Desultory Media Coverage

10. (SBU) Media coverage of the provincial Party Congresses largely was rote and dry. There was no substantive reporting on issues raised in the conclaves, no biographic information on newly-elected members, and no real detail on tasks and provincial targets during the upcoming five-year plan cycle (2006-2010). HCMC's Party Congress was a relative exception, with speeches by HCMC Party Secretary Triet emphasizing the Party's need to attract fresh blood, fight corruption, and improve the training of Party cadres to retain its credibility. Former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's address to the HCMC Party Congress received heavy HCMC press coverage. In a pitch for comprehensive reform and introspection, Kiet called for the HCMC Party Congress -- as well as all other provincial congresses -- to review both achievements and failures in the thirty years since reunification. (Note: The first ten years after unification saw the imposition of Marxist orthodoxy and the collapse of the economy. Socio-economic mismanagement led to the GVN's policy of Doi Moi or economic liberalization in 1986. End Note.)

11. (SBU) With the exception of neighboring Dong Nai Province, which also conducted a 30-year review, other Provincial Congresses fudged the issue or explicitly covered 20 years. Speakers at the provincial Party Congresses in the sensitive Central Highlands were reported to have urged local leaders to ensure that "security and stability" remain paramount even as

they focus on socio-economic development.

HCMC: Anticipating Major Change in mid-2006

12. (SBU) Although HCMC's November 2005 Party Congress left virtually intact the entire senior HCMC Party personnel roster, major changes are anticipated after the national 10th Party Congress. Insiders tell us that HCMC Party Secretary and Politburo member Nguyen Minh Triet will be transferred to Hanoi, although the exact job he will hold is unclear. Some say he is slated to become Vietnam's next President, replacing the retiring Tran Duc Luong; others say he will replace Tran Dinh Hoan as Chief of the Party Organization Committee. In either case, Triet will retain his Politburo status. Triet reportedly is pushing for his protege, Deputy HCMC Party Secretary Le Hoang Quan, to replace him as HCMC Party Secretary (Party tradition calls for the HCMC Party Secretary to be a Politburo member). However, Truong Vinh Trong, the current Chief of the Central Commission on Home Security, may be assigned to HCMC and Quan tapped to replace HCMC People's Committee Chairman Le Thanh Hai, whose future is clouded because of an emerging road-building corruption scandal linked to his family. Hai's political position is reported to be further weakened by the retirement of Vice-President Truong My Hoa, to whom he is related by marriage.

13. (SBU) Pham Phuong Thao, Deputy HCMC Party Secretary and current head of the HCMC People's Council, is slated to be the new Vice-President. Thao is a protege of former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet. Current HCMC People's Committee Vice-Chairman Nguyen Van Dua also is a rising star within the HCMC Party apparatus and a favorite of Triet's. The Standing Vice-Chairman of the People's Committee, Dr. Nguyen Thien Nhan, may be tapped for a Vice-Ministerial position in Hanoi, but is reported not to have the support of the Party apparatus in HCMC for a more senior job in the city.

Comment

14. (SBU) Reformers within the Party had been advocating for personnel change in Dak Lak; the removal of the provincial Party Secretary could be important for U.S. religious freedom and

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human rights interests in the Central Highlands. The outgoing Dak Lak Party Secretary was a third-generation revolutionary and ethnic minority member who vehemently opposed efforts to ease pressure on Protestants and to issue passports in family reunification (Visas 93) cases involving ethnic minority persons. Provincial officials openly (and with some relief) characterized the new Party Secretary as "much more moderate"

during our visit to the province in early January. Similarly, his newly appointed Deputy, and possible new People's Committee Chairman, Senior MPS Colonel Cu, struck us as tough but open-minded. In the month since the Dak Lak Party Congress, there has been encouraging movement on religious freedom and Visas 93 issues (reftel).

15. (SBU) Corruption also appears to be a key factor in shaping the Party's provincial personnel decisions. Can Tho, Dak Lak, and Kien Giang provinces uncovered major land and financial misappropriation scandals in 2005. All three provinces removed their leaders and promoted individuals with security backgrounds to leadership positions. The apparent deliberations within the Party on the removal of HCMC People's Committee Chairman Hai and his replacement with the Chief of the Party's Central Committee for Home Security is consistent with this trend.

16. (SBU) The current crop of provincial leaders is the last generation to have any active connection to the "American War," which still helps shape the mindset of some within the Party. Their successors -- the next generation of provincial leaders (and Central Committee members) -- will have more diverse backgrounds, better training, and international exposure. End Comment.
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